

Greetings Everyone,

My name is Shawn Gaston. I am a lifelong resident of Waterbury, CT which has allowed me as a student, mother, grandmother of 9, and a Community Leader with plenty of opportunity to deal with the things that our schools lack and one being the lack of Minority Teachers. Over the last six years, Connecticut has made strides in diversifying its educator workforce, and has reached its short-term goal of 10%. Although 10% is better than what we had in the past, we still need to bring that percentage up in order to reach our minority students. When black students see teachers who look like me with natural hair or locs it brings them a sense of peace knowing someone that looks like them understand their delivery when they speak with their emotions and not take it as a threat because those teachers not only understand the culture, but can relate to where we come from which will help white teachers and students to see us as an assist and not a threat. This will bring the balance that our education system needs. We can't stop here. We must do more to support educators of color to enter and remain in the field. This year's bill, SB 274 and SB 1 must do more by making a significant impact on how it supports our educators who are looking to gain entry into the education system now and for our future educators. The only way we can make this work is by reducing the certification hurdles and cost that keep minority students from entering the education field because they cannot afford to pay for the testing. We can also make an impact by investing in educators who are already working in our alliance districts by offering a Master Degree Scholarship fund that will allow them to grow in the field while committing to remain in our districts that need them the most, as well as providing sign on bonuses for those who work in these districts. Our rate of change is too slow, and cannot afford to delay what is needed now, and for our future educators in order for students in these districts to have some who look like them to look up to as a future educator. Please include the recommendations in SB274 or SB 1 to strengthen the language and make an impact for our educators today and the future. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on bill SB 274 and SB 1. Remember that together we can secure our children's future.